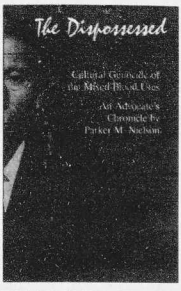
THE WEST UNDER COVER

Reviews of books of regional interest



The Dispossessed
Cultural Genocide of the Mixed-Blood Utes
By Parker M. Nielson
University of Oklahoma Press: $34.95

BY MARTIN NAPARSTECK
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

One summer day in 1964 in Salt Lake City, three women went to the law office of Parker M. Nielson and complained they had been cheated on a used car.

The three women, Anita Reyos, Ezilda Hendricks, and Marguerite Murray, were mixed-blood Unitas — part Ute and part something else. They had paid for their used cars with stock owned in the Ute Distribution Corp., which was not a typical business but a legal entity set up to assure that all members of the Ute tribe received their fair share of a $32 million payment from the U.S. government as compensation for land taken a century earlier.

Full-bloods, however, wanted all money and land of the three Ute reservations — two in Colorado and one in Utah — although the law authorizing the payment seemed to say part of it should be reserved for the mixed-bloods, most of whom lived in Utah.

Nielson points out repeatedly that Utes were never treated well by the Mormon culture that came to dominate their homeland.

In 1850 Mormons killed about 40 Utes in retaliation for one Mormon having been killed, and when about 40 others surrendered, the Mormons killed them, too. Mormons in effect expelled the Utes from every fertile area in the territory, relegating them to an inhospitable mountain range around present-day Roosevelt.

All segments of white society were guilty of mistreating Indians, first killing them, then restricting them to ghetto-like reservations, then trying to force them to abandon their traditional cultures and become white in appearance and attitude and customs. By the 1950s the favored policy of the Eisenhower administration was "termination." That is, the special relationship between Indians and the government, whereby Indians were allowed to remain on their limited land and live within their own cultures, using payments the government had guaranteed them in exchange for having stolen their land, was to be viewed as a form of welfare that entrapped the Indians in poverty. The idea was that Indians would be forced to become more like whites and would thus be better off.

Two principal architects of the plan were Arthur Watkins, U.S. senator from Utah, and John Boyden, a Salt Lake City attorney who represented full-blood and mixed-blood Utes, although these two groups were in conflict with each other. Nielson expresses something very close to disdain for Boyden's conflict of interest.

Nielson writes, "It was as if Watkins and Boyden were using their control over Indian affairs to implement Mormon doctrine. A familiar tenet of Mormonism was that if the Indians would accept the Mormon religion, 'many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white and delightsome people.' "

Almost as villainous in Nielson's narrative is Salt Lake City banker George Eccles, who in effect conspired with Boyden to deprive the mixed-bloods of their shares of the settlement. Every time mixed-bloods and full-bloods came into conflict, Boyden sided with the full-bloods, and Eccles and Watkins were continually in on the shenanigans, he writes.

Worse, perhaps, than the loss of their financial interests was a legal provision that no one would be a member of the Ute tribe unless he or she had at least 51 percent blood that was Ute. (Nielson attacks the idea that "blood" rather than culture makes a person a member of a tribe, but he continually refers to that term because, as a lawyer, that was the legal reality he had to work with). That provision in effect meant that anyone who married outside the tribe, say a Ute who married a Navajo, would have children who were a member of neither tribe, because they would be only 50 percent — one percentage point short — of the legal requirement. Obviously, over a few generations, this would mean that a tribe would cease to exist.

That is where the use of the term "genocide" comes from in the subtitle of Nielson's book. It is a strong word, and *The Dispossessed* is a strong narrative. It is also an indictment of how one culture came to kill another.

Martin Naparsteck is a novelist.

PAPERBACKS IN BRIEF

BY NANCY PATE
ORLANDO SENTINEL

There's something novel about these new paperbacks:

Rebel Yell

The Black Flower, by Howard Bahr (Owl/Henry Holt, $12): Bahr's novel of the Civil War came out hardcover from a very small press in 1997 and consequently was overshadowed by another first novel, Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*.

But Bahr's tale, an American Academy of Arts and Letters award-winner, is also eloquently realistic and memorable.

Wounded in battle near Franklin, Tenn., in the fall of 1864, young Confederate rifleman Bushrod Carter ends up in a makeshift hospital being nursed by Anna Hereford, who already is contending with wartime losses. Still, she and Carter are drawn together even as the "black flower" of death and destruction continues to blossom around them.

Fire and Ice

The Sharp Teeth of Love, by Doris Betts (Scribner, $12): Betts prefaces her absorbing story with Robert Frost's poem, "Fire and Ice," and uses its imagery throughout her story of Luna Stone.

The young woman leaves her fiance to take off for the High Sierra, camping near the spot where the snowbound Donner Party starved to death a century earlier. Trying to figure out the meaning of love and life, Luna encounters not only a runaway child and a young man in search of himself but also the ghost of Tamsen Donner.

At the Drive-In

The Flamingo Rising, by Larry Baker (Ballantine, $12.95): Baker avoids cliches as he spins his inventive story of an eccentric family living inside — yes, inside — a giant drive-in theater in Jacksonville in the 1960s.

Hubert Lee is the visionary who built the Flamingo with its humongous screen facing the Atlantic Ocean; Turner West, Hubert's mortal enemy, is the mortician across the highway; and Abraham Isaac Lee is Hubert's adopted Korean son who comes of age at the Flamingo.

Quite a Treat

Dairy Queen Days, by Robert Inman (Back Bay/Little, Brown, $12.95): In 1979, 16-year-old Trout Moseley returns to the ancestral home of Moseley, Ga., while his mother has a nervous breakdown in Atlanta and his preacher father acts increasingly odd.

Trout soon learns that the mill town is not s sleepy as it looks, but he gets a job down at the Dairy Queen where Moseley's different classes all come together. Still, life is not nearly as smooth and sweet as ice cream — although this novel often is.

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